

Your moving checklist

This step-by-step guide takes you from beginning to end of a well-organized, low-stress move.

By Marilyn Lewis of MSN Real Estate – August, 2009

The two best ways to lower the stress of moving are to employ a strategy and start as early as you can. Try this guide to organizing it all, whether you're using a full-service mover or renting a truck, and loading and driving it yourself.

Preparation

Before starting to tick tasks off your checklist, take a day to get prepared. Assemble these three key items to stay organized throughout the madness of moving:

1. Calendar. A calendar is a project manager's best friend. It allows you to visualize every aspect of your move, says Laura Leist, president of the National Association of Professional Organizers and a certified relocation-transition specialist. Use a blank paper calendar or electronic calendar, or make your own by printing several month's worth of blank calendar pages (print calendar templates from [Microsoft Office Online](#)). Leist's advice:

- Mark your move date on the calendar. Black out all days when you're unavailable to work on moving. What remains is your time available for the project.
- To wrap her mind around the job, Leist lists every room in the house with notes on what each contains. She schedules each room into the calendar, doing little-used rooms first. She also schedules many other checklist tasks, especially ones with firm deadlines.

2. A big notebook. Use it to track all your arrangements, phone numbers, thoughts, plans, notes and lists. Attach plastic Ziploc bags, pockets and folders. Print out this checklist and put it in the notebook.

3. A locking box. (Available at hardware stores or search "locking box" online). Use this for hand-carrying anything irreplaceable, like important documents, medicines, family treasures and jewelry, since movers' insurance won't cover high-value items. (Alternative: Send valuable items by [Registered Mail](#), which is given enhanced security and is insured against damage or loss for up to \$25,000.)

Countdown

Four to eight weeks to go

Eliminate stuff. Severely scale back your stuff. For encouragement and tips, read "[Cut your square footage in half.](#)" Hold a garage sale or tag sale (learn how in "[Empty your closets, fill your pockets.](#)") Donate leftovers to charity or offer them on [Freecycle](#).

Hire movers. Decide whether to use a full-service mover or do some jobs yourself. Read [“Moving: Hire a pro or do it yourself?”](#) for guidance on deciding and choosing a mover, truck rental or portable storage company. Ask your mover for departure and arrival dates as soon as early as eight weeks in advance, even if you must change it later. Learn the size of the moving vehicle so you can decide where it can be parked. If it must stay at your home for several days, call the city’s streets department or talk with your apartment’s manager to make arrangements. Hire help for jobs you won’t be doing yourself, like packing, loading the truck or cleaning the house. Hire help now, too, for unloading and unpacking in your new home. Ask when payment is required, as this varies by company. Some want money up front; others require a deposit and the balance paid at delivery; and still others take nothing but your credit card imprint until delivery. Learn whether you can use a check or credit card, how the company’s estimates and cost overruns are calculated and charged, and what guarantees will apply.

Service appliances. Ask the mover which appliances and equipment will need servicing before moving and after the move, and schedule the work on both ends.

Give notice. If you’re a renter, give the landlord 30 days notice that you’re leaving *in writing*. Confirm what’s required to get your deposit refunded.

Assemble packing supplies. Packing a moving van is far easier with standard-sized moving boxes rather than liquor and grocery boxes. Start early searching for freebie supplies, and visit a rental truck company to view the boxes available. Estimate your requirements and make purchases. Designate a “move center” in your home to store it all.

Start packing. Begin with the least-used rooms – garage, attic and basement. Next, attack the living area. Designate one room for all packed boxes. Figure on taking one day per room.

Make records. Photocopy important documents that you’re not carrying with you.

Help kids plan. Children enjoy keeping their own moving notebooks, writing journal entries and pasting in treasures, photos and mementoes. These can help them with the transition.

Contact schools. Give notice and arrange for record transfers. Contact new schools to arrange admissions, learn requirements and transfer medical records and transcripts. Print out and put school calendars and schedules in your notebook.

Plan the trip. Get maps and directions. If necessary, book hotel reservations, making careful plans for the security of your vehicles and possessions.

Write off moving expenses

Gather medical records. Tell doctors and dentists you’ll be leaving and get copies of your records. Ask for paper copies of each prescription to put in your notebook for a backup. Request referrals to providers in your new town.

Wrap up loose ends. Return library books and things you've borrowed, pick up things you've loaned, dry cleaning and items out for repair.

Transfer prescriptions. Find a pharmacy near your new home and arrange to have prescriptions transferred. Carry enough medications with you to last two weeks.

Get acquainted. Check with the chamber of commerce in your new town. Most have Web sites and many will mail you a new-resident packet with helpful information. MSN [City Guides](#) can help you locate moving services, utilities, entertainment, parks, schools and other essentials.

Call the DMV. If you're moving to a new state, contact that state's department of motor vehicles to learn how soon you must obtain a new driver's license and register your vehicles. (See [DMV-department-of-motor-vehicles.com](#) for links to each state DMV site.) You may need a new driver's license to register vehicles. Contact the DMV in your old state to find out if you're expected to surrender your vehicles' old license plates. Giving back plates allows the state to cancel the license number and protect you from fraudulent use of your plate number. Download or order the state's driver's license manual to study if you must take the exam to get licensed. Read it early to know the rules of the road in your new home. **Tip:** Some states require emissions testing or a yearly inspection of vehicles.

Check tax deductions. Ask your accountant or read [IRS Publication 521 \(2008\), Moving Expenses](#), which the agency says will be updated for 2009 before tax time. If any aspect of your move is deductible, designate an envelope or file for storing documents and receipts.

Notify creditors, cancel services. As you open mail, contact each creditor or service provider of your change of address, including banks, periodical subscriptions, credit-card companies, brokerages, insurance companies and doctors. Cancel services you won't need, including lawn or garden help, newspaper delivery, health club, utilities and trash pickup.

Check insurance. Ask your agent:

1. About coverage your policy provides for damage or theft of possessions during the move and in storage;
2. About your coverage for liability and property damage coverage while driving a rental truck, hauling a trailer or towing a car;
3. For a referral to a company representative in your new town;
4. What will happen to your rates: Moving may trigger a change as prices are set in part by ZIP code and take into account your commute distance;
5. Whether a supplemental policy is appropriate for expensive or precious items;
6. For proof of insurance to show in obtaining a new driver's license or to register vehicles;
7. For information on road insurance, which you should get if you're driving.

Document. To help support claims in case of damage or loss, have expensive or irreplaceable items like jewelry, art and furniture appraised and photograph (close up), or videotape possessions.

Service vehicles. Have a mechanic give each vehicle a safety inspection, service them if necessary and rotate tires or install new ones. If you're shipping vehicles, hire a shipper.

Arrange for storage. If you'll need to keep things in storage, now's the time to make arrangements.

Write down serial numbers. In your notebook, record numbers for electronic equipment.

Make a clean sweep. Drain fuel from lawn equipment and get rid of household poisons, flammable liquids and any broken or leaky containers.

Two to three weeks to go

Change your address. Go to the [U.S. Postal Service online](#) or in person to change your address and have mail held or forwarded to your new address. You can designate a date when you want the address change to begin.

Remember tax forms. Give your new address to the human relations department at your job so you'll get your W2 forms in time. If you're self-employed, notify clients to use your new address on your 1099 forms. If you make estimated quarterly payments, follow instructions to print out and file a [Form 8822](#) change of address notification with the IRS. (Learn more: [Tips for taxpayers making a move.](#)) Otherwise, you're not required to tell the IRS that you're moving. You can simply print the new address in the appropriate boxes on your tax return.

Line up child care. Ask a trusted friend, family member or babysitter to take care of your children — preferably at their house — on moving day.

Prepare pets. If you're flying, learn what papers, shots and preparations pets will need. Take pets to the vet for checkups, guidance on keeping them healthy during the move and, if recommended, medications to keep them calm. Put immunization and health records in your move notebook. Buy I.D. tags and pet carriers (Check thrift stores and classified ads before paying retail). Tips: Read "[How to move your pet safely](#)" from the Humane Society of the United States; if you're driving, see the Humane Society's information on [animal-friendly accommodations](#).

Finish packing. Leave only a few clothes and essentials. Clean the garage, basement and attic. Finish any household repairs.

Switch utilities. Schedule service at your new home with an Internet service provider, telephone company, heating oil or gas and electrical companies so you will have these services at your new home immediately upon your arrival. (Locate cable, Internet and phone providers by ZIP code at [Cablemover.com](#) and use MSN [CitySearch](#).) Also schedule technicians to set up computers, routers and entertainment centers in advance. Arrange to have utilities disconnected at your current home.

Eat from the pantry. Consume the food in your refrigerator and in the cupboards.

One week to go

Assemble supplies. Gather equipment and supplies, including screwdrivers and wrenches and sandwich

bags for saving hardware, (tape bags to furniture parts), a digital camera and notepad and pencil for drawing or photographing items to help in reassembling. Arrange for pizza, pop, donuts, coffee, chips and snacks to serve professional movers or helpers. Rent furniture pads and dollies (from a truck rental company). Buy a back brace. (Read "[Moving a heavy load safely](#)" at Performance Prime.)

Think ahead. Pack an "open first" box with essentials needed immediately upon arrival: coffee, filters and a tea kettle or coffee pot, mugs, first-aid supplies, scissors, tape, paper and pens, small toys, crayons and coloring books, towels, rags and cleaning supplies, snacks and a few hand tools. Label the box and make sure it goes on the truck last (to emerge first).

Stay in touch. E-mail your moving dates, new address and contact information to friends and family. (See [Hallmark's free moving announcement e-cards](#))

Final chores. In the last few days before the move, pack up the kitchen. Clean the refrigerator, cupboards, stove and kitchen. (Eat takeout and frozen pizza.) Finish any remaining packing. (Live from suitcases.) Disassemble furniture and electronic components and pack them in containers made for this purpose (purchased at truck rental companies).

What not to take. Send any valuables you're not personally carrying to your new address by registered mail. Dispose of gas cans, propane tanks and houseplants, which won't typically survive a move.

Visit the bank. Get cash and travelers checks for the trip, factoring in tolls, gas, hotels and meals on the road. If your mover will require a registered check — many do — get it now so you'll have it to pay upon delivery. Clean out your safe deposit box.

Change banks. Balance your checkbook, deposit enough to cover outstanding checks and automatic payments. Talk with your current bank about when to close current accounts, open new ones and whether there's a waiting period after transferring your money.

The day before the move

Call the truck rental company. Confirm your pickup time. The dealer will tell you the location of your truck or trailer and you can set a pickup time.

Drop off the kids. Bring children to friends, family or a babysitter.

Drop breadcrumbs. Give your itinerary and planned stops to a friend or family member.

Professional Services

Go to bed early. Get lots of sleep.

Pack the car. If you're driving and have a secure space to leave a packed car out overnight, put as much as you can into the car now so you can get it organized for the trip. Leave out your valuables.

Moving day

Clear out the house. Strip beds; pack remaining bedding and towels.

Do a walk-through. Double-check every room, including drawers, shelves and closets. Remember the garage and attic.

Supervise. If you're using movers, pay attention to them so you're confident everything is handled and loaded correctly and confirm their account on the inventory record sheets of the condition of your furniture. Challenge any inaccuracies. When you sign the mover's inventory record after the packing's done, you're certifying its accuracy.

Inventory. Sign the movers' inventory, which is a list of all items taken from your house, labeled and numbered. If you're loading the truck yourself, label and number each box and maintain a list of everything.

Pay the movers. If your mover requires money up front, have the check or cash on hand.

Carry your valuables. Hang on to your locking box, your moving calendar and notebook.

Moving is never easy, but because you've done most of the work in advance, your moving day can stay fairly low-stress and you'll have energy to enjoy this new phase of your life.